

THE GROWTH OF AMERICA'S OLDER POPULATION



Breakthroughs in Science and Technology

The United States has long been considered a nation of youth. In colonial times, half of the nation's inhabitants were younger than age 16. Most people did not reach an old age, as we know it today. Even by 1900, the average life expectancy of the American people was only 47 years. Fortunately, there have been breakthroughs in science and technology that have led to the extension of the lifespan. Most newborns can now expect to survive their infancy and, on average, live well into their eighth decade. America is truly a nation characterized by both youth and longevity.

A Society of Longevity

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, America's population age 65 or older grew by 74% between 1970 and 1999, from 20 million to almost 35 million people. The median age of the population has increased significantly from 28 in 1970 to almost 36 in 1999. But the growth of the older population in recent decades will pale in comparison to the burgeoning of older Americans that will take place, beginning in 2010, with the aging of the baby boomers.

The Baby Boomers Come Of Age

The 76 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 constitute the baby boom generation. In 1999, baby boomers represented almost 30% of the U.S. population. Over the next 12 to 30 years, the boomers will join the ranks of the population 65 years and older. While one in eight Americans was 65+ in 1999, this will rise to about one in five in 2030.

The phenomenon of longevity in the 21st century magnifies the importance of life course planning. The opportunity to live a long life carries a new responsibility. Daily decisions can be made to stay active and healthy. As important, we can save and invest wisely, commit to work or activities that are satisfying and engaging,



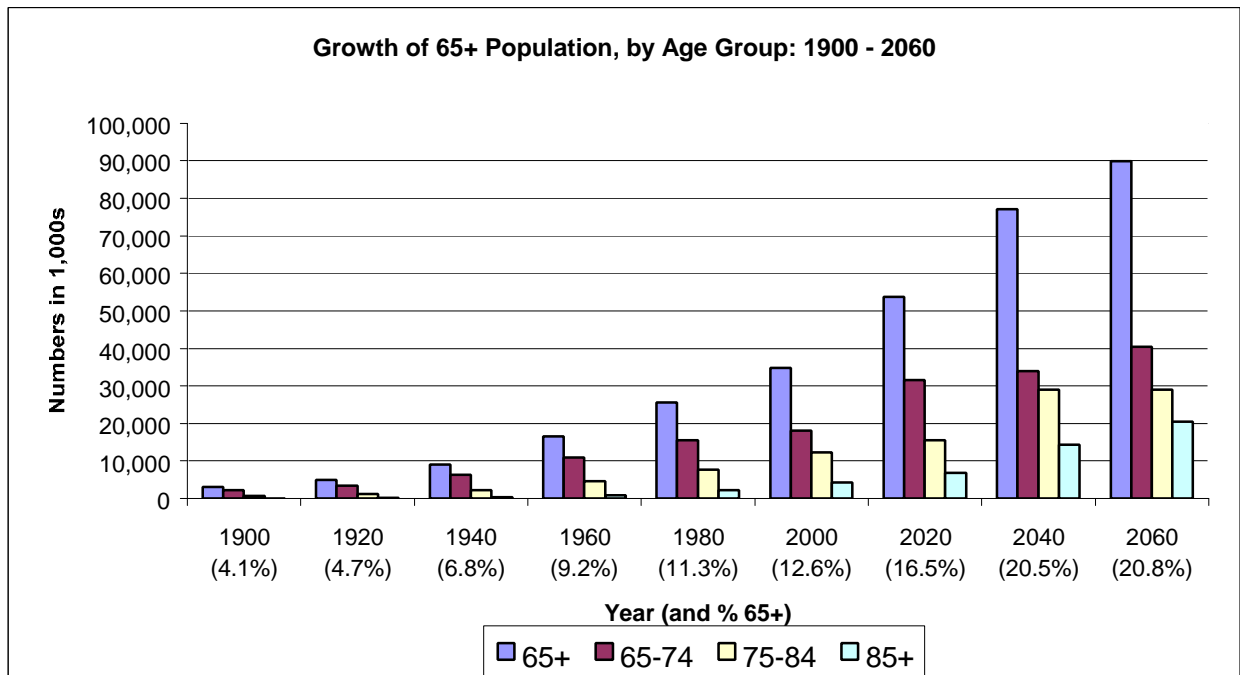
form and sustain lasting ties with family and friends, and take steps to fulfill our spiritual needs.

Prepare Now

The U.S. Administration on Aging encourages individuals and families, planners and policymakers alike to recognize the value of life course planning. America's people and its families can prepare now for the longevity that they are likely to enjoy in the new millennium.

The Oldest-Old—A Rapidly Increasing Subpopulation

The “oldest-old” are those who are at least 85 years of age. This group is the fastest-growing segment of America's older population. The number of people aged 85 and older has more than tripled since 1970. The number of centenarians—people at least 100 years old—almost doubled in the past decade. Although the 4.2 million persons age 85+ now constitute less than two percent of the total population, they are having a major impact on the nation's health care and social service delivery systems and on the nation's family caregivers.



Working in close partnership with its sister agencies in the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration on Aging provides leadership, technical assistance, and support to the national aging network of 57 State Units on Aging, 655 Area Agencies on Aging, 225 Tribal and native organizations representing 300 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal organizations and 2 organizations serving Native Hawaiians, plus thousands of service providers, adult care centers, caregivers, and volunteers.

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